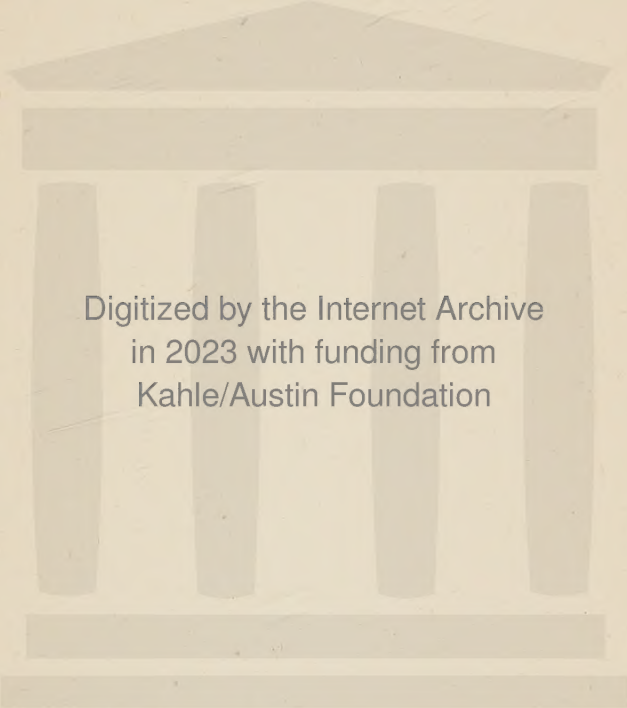


Blue Homespun

FRANK OLIVER CALL

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BLUE HOMESPUN

OTHER WORKS BY
FRANK OLIVER CALL
In a Belgian Garden
Acanthus and Wild Grape

Blue Homespun

By

FRANK OLIVER CALL

Illustrations by

ORSON S. WHEELER

THE RYERSON PRESS
TORONTO

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*A SONNET SERIES
OF FRENCH CANADA*



ORSUN
WHEEL

THE ROAD TO STE. ANGELE

THROUGH a small village, past a great stone church,
Leads the long straight road of rutted clay,
Where heavy-laden carts and buckboards lurch
Between flat stubble fields. Along the way
Wild purple asters grow beneath the trees,
With chicory stars that mock the August sky,
And yellow butterflies and bumblebees
On perfumed wandering wings go drifting by.

The days and years may pass in silent flight—
Unchanged the road leads from the great church
 spire,
Past whitewashed barns, and houses all alight
At fall of dusk, with friendly candle-fire;
Long, narrow, straight, it goes without a bend
To a white wayside calvary at the end.



ORSON S. WHEELER.

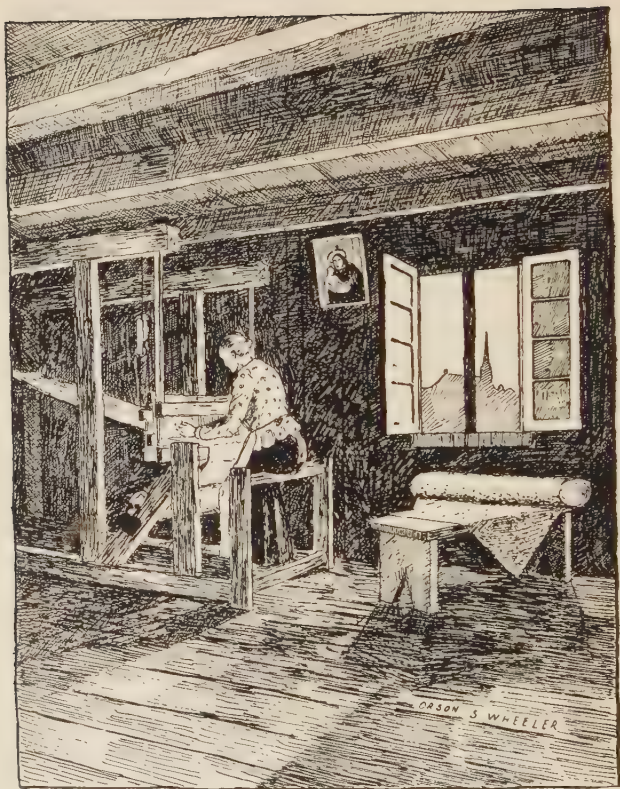
AN OLD HABITANT

HE SITS in silence on his porch at night
And looks into the gloom. The low winds
mutter

Across dark level fields, and poplars utter
Low sighing sounds. Along the horizon's height
His barns rise darkly in the waning light;
Within the house, behind the half-closed shutter,
A flickering candle burns, and white moths flutter
Against the casement in their blundering flight.

Attracted by the glow of village lamps,
The younger folk have left him with his pipe,
Listening to the wind and crickets call.
He only thinks: The sun has dried the swamps,
The frost has touched the corn, and oats are ripe,
And in the orchard fruit begins to fall.

THREE



BLUE HOMESPUN

BEYOND the doorway of the tiny room
The yellow autumn sunshine died away
Into the shadows of the waning day;
Wrapped in the twilight stood old Marie's loom,
A shapeless mass of timbers in the gloom;
But one small window cast a golden ray
Upon a bench where sky-blue homespun lay,
Lighting the dusk-like sheaves of chicory bloom.

Above the loom the Holy Virgin hung,
Blue-robed and smiling down; and old Marie,
After the evening angelus had rung,
Arose and touched the picture lovingly
With rough brown hand, then turned and looked
once more
Upon her sky-blue cloth, and closed the door.



ORSON S. WHEELER

CHANSONS

THE EVENING through they sang the old
chansons;

I sat among the shantymen and listened,
Amid the fumes of shag at Fils-du-Grand.
Outside the camp the wintry moonlight glistened
Between the hemlock trees across the snow;
La Claire Fontaine, Par derrière chez mon Père,
Chansons des Blondes, Malbrough s'en va-t-en
Guerre,
All mingled with the tale of Isabeau.

And then Nazire crooned out Sainte Marguerite;
With rough voice softened for the lullaby
He prayed the saint to guard his own petite;
The singing ceased; I heard a tired sigh
From one or two, but scarce a word was said
As silently each tumbled into bed.



LA TERRE

WHEN Jo was young he used to hate the
land;

And though he struggled hard and tried to wrest
A living from it, still he schemed and planned
To seek the distant town where men were dressed
In better stuff than homespun. Years have
passed,

And now St. Jean seems very far away,
For chains he would not shatter hold him fast
In golden bondage to the loam and clay.

His fields are something more than clay and loam
To yield a living, bring him gain or loss,
Now he is old; and from his whitewashed home
He looks towards the churchyard with its cross,
Then at his fruitful acres lying there
Between, and murmurs low, "La bonne, bonne
terre!"



THE OVEN

BESIDE her oven of clay and stone she stands
Where smoldering logs of pine and spruce
are glowing,

And burnt-out sparks, like melting flakes, are
snowing

Upon her torn straw hat. The tattered bands
Of her worn homespun in the breeze are blowing
About her cowhide shoes. Through strong
brown hands

She calls "Souper!" to sons and husband hoeing
The early corn beyond the pasture lands.

She is the priestess of an ancient shrine,
Keeping alight the sacrificial spark
That made old altars through the ages shine.
Her dull contentment, pressed from years of toil,
Still feeds the fire with its sacred oil,
And burns and glows through storm and sun and
dark.



THE SUGAR-MAKER

PEASANT in form and face old Philippe stood
Beneath tall maples in the softening snow,
That spread its whiteness through the sugarwood;
Above him cawed the first returning crow;
A blue haze lay upon the hilltop's rim,
When early April wrought its magic spells,
And from tin buckets filling fast to brim
The dropping sap rang out like sanctus bells.

And as old Philippe heard the echoes pealing
Among the maple trees and silver birch,
That rose above him like the vaulted ceiling,
And painted pillars of the village church,
He looked towards the blue mysterious sky—
Then bowed as though the Host were passing by.



THE RACONTEUR

THE FIRE roared loudly in the double stove,
Until its sides like burnished copper glowed;
Outside the snow fell, and the north wind drove
White ghostly figures down the frozen road.
They listened open-mouthed and open-eyed
To Jean's weird stories of the Windigo
That haunts the woods, and of Pierre who died
Because he saw the Walker of the Snow.

He told the story of the Phantom Bell,
And ghosts and mighty hunters came and went;
Like children frightened by the tales they tell
They listened until half the night was spent;
Then Jean arose, looked out and shook his head.
"Fa nwerre! Ja va rester icitte," he said.



THE MOTHER

SHE TALKED to me of Francois, Isadore,
Of Wilfred, Rosalie and 'chite Adèle—
All married now with children three or four—
And Paul who kept the store at Sainte Angèle;
And then she told me of her curé son,
Who sang the daily mass at Saint Hubert,
And how one Sunday when the mass was done
He went to dinner with the grand vicaire.

But when she spoke of 'chit Napoléon,
And of that time that seemed like yesterday
When she awoke to find that he had gone
No one could tell her where, she turned away,
And looked beyond me with a smothered sigh
Upon the empty road that wandered by.



THE CONVENT GARDEN

HERE lies a garden with gray walls of stone,
Washed by the green Saint Lawrence as it
surges

And eddies into foam. Low pine-tree dirges
From northern forests by the winds are blown
Across the water, and with drowsy drone,
The muttered prayers and bells and chanted
masses

Send forth soft echoes on each breeze that passes
Around a black cross, standing gaunt and lone.

And in the evening by the garden walls
Walk silent black-robed nuns with flowing veils,
Watching the crows and swallows in their flight;
But when from the black cross a shadow falls
Upon their pathway, and the sunlight pales,
They turn white faces to the convent light.



THE MAKER OF TOY BOATS

HERE by this calm backwater, where the
tides
That creep up from the great gulf never reach,
His clumsy boat the placid water rides,
Half stranded on the muddy reed-grown beach;
And bending his gray head until the dark
Bids him lay by his task, he trims and hews
Small poplar twigs and strips of white birch-bark
To make his elfin fleet of toy canoes.

But while he makes to sail some tiny pond
Toy boats of frail white bark, the ship of dreams
He fashions for himself drifts out beyond
The sheltering hills to far-off lakes and streams,
Where tall dark spires of fir-trees pierce blue skies,
And down broad streams sail phantom argosies.



CHAMBLY

THE UNRUFFLED water of the Basin lies
Hushed by the brooding August afternoon;
The distant rapid's monotone, in tune
With beating steel-blue wings of dragon-flies,
Among green rushes sings old lullabies;
About the crumbling fort, like some dull rune
Of ancient days, echoes a drowsy croon
That on the rose-gray bastion breaks and dies.

Across the water sleeps the silent town,
Where through a silver haze the gray church spire
Rises against the fading sunset fire;
A boat drifts downward towards the far-off sea;
The angelus rings, and darkness, creeping down,
Enshrouds the whole in night and mystery.

*FROM A WALLED
GARDEN*

THE FIRST GARDEN

I

GOD MADE a garden when the world was
young,
And walked each evening, pacing calm and slow
Along its pathways, when the sun was low
Behind the palm-trees, with dark branches flung
Like giant hands against red skies. Among
The cool damp grasses, waving to and fro,
The night-moths and the song-birds saw Him go,
Lifting His face to where the new moon hung.

And I with care and toiling, too, have made
A walled-in garden—a small, lovely thing—
Where golden orioles sing their mating song,
And brown moths flutter from the dark fir glade.
O here a wandering dream with broken wing
May find a place to rest and tarry long!

TULIP TIME

II

'TIS TULIP time, and all my garden glows
With passionate color, like a marriage bed
For some barbaric Eastern monarch spread
With patterned rugs of crimson, bronze and rose,
And all the unnamed hues that time bestows
On ancient tapestries. The path I tread
Is lined with courtesans in gold and red,
Whispering hot passion on each wind that blows.

O let me turn away from these dark flowers
That boldly flaunt before my tortured eyes
The burning beauty of their red and gold!
To heal the wounds of all these passionate hours,
O let me see the blue of autumn skies,
Or scilla stars above the cool, black mould!

CARPE DIEM

III

THE DAY dawns bright beyond my garden
wall,
Creeps through the gate and lingers by a bed
Of oriental poppies, flaming red
As scarlet tanagers. Bird-voices call
From slender trembling birches, rising tall
And white against the blue. This day, you said,
Must be our own; the past shall be as dead;
Upon the walk I hear your footsteps fall.

Beloved, enter in and close the door,
Let us not listen to the mighty sea
Of life, whose beating waves eternally
Threaten to sweep beyond the level shore,
But let us snatch one day of ecstasy,
One day—and be content for evermore.

GRAY AFTERNOON

IV

HOW GRAY it is this autumn afternoon,
My glorious garden of the sun-drenched
hours,
Though honey-bees among late-blossoming flowers
Are singing still an old forgotten rune
Of long-dead lovers—a low, gentle tune—
Like old-world troubadours. September showers
Have strewn with fallen leaves the birch-tree
bowers,
Where still one white-throat sings of far-off June.

We must not tarry longer in the gray
Half-lights of autumn evening. We must turn
Our eyes to see the western fires burn
Along the pathway of departing day;
Here in its wasting splendor we may learn
The worth of noontide and the price we pay.

THIRTY

NOVEMBER SNOW

V

MY GARDEN is a ghost of summer's glory—
A dim reminder of departed things—
Dead flowers haunted by the ghostly wings
Of bees upon a honey-seeking foray,
A few brown quivering stalks that tell the story
Of sun-drenched summer hours and far-off springs,
White shivering birches where no oriole sings,
Dark spires of spruce with snow bent down and
hoary.

This cannot be the place with tulips glowing
Through which at sunset humming-birds would
dart

On unseen wings. The drifting snow is blowing
Along bare pathways leading far apart.
O strange white blossoms in my garden growing!
O strange white silence fallen on my heart!

THIRTY-ONE

SIMPLES

SIMPLES

I HAVE a closet where old simples lie
In scented dusk behind a secret door,
Simples I gathered for my healing store
From fields and hills beneath a sunny sky,
Or in old forests when the moon was high;
But most beside the sea, where white gulls soar
Above gray headlands, and the ocean's roar
Mingles as distant music with their cry.

And from these simples, by my magic craft
I brew a potion, dark with mystery,
That brings again, when I have drunk the draught,
Those wondrous days beside the chanting sea,
Gray sands, blue waters and the joy that laughed
Across the waves and in the heart of me.

THE HILLTOP

ACROSS blue hills white wisps of cloud are
scudding;
Our path has led us to a rocky crest
Through fields where autumn crocuses are budding
Beneath the sun, fast bending to the west.
We left behind the thronged and dusty highway
Where all day long the tired footsteps beat,
And climbed together up a lonely byway
Where stones were rough, but where the flowers
were sweet.

Too soon my path may lead me to the valley
While you still linger on the sunlit height,
But all their strength my faltering feet will rally,
And all my spirit rise above the night,
If I, in memory, still may touch your lips,
Or feel across the dark your finger-tips.

TREES IN AUTUMN

UPON the hills the crimson maples burn
And clumps of mountain-ash are all aflame;
In upland pastures the white birches turn
From green to gold, and make a glittering frame
Around blue patches of October sky;
For Death, with soft cool hand, has touched each
 bough;
And nestling to their mother soon must lie
The flaming leaves that flaunt their glory now.

And though on frost-browned hillsides one by one
Their leaves are scattered by an unseen hand,
Unbowed and glowing in the autumn sun,
Facing the wintry dawn the brave trees stand—
Great color symphonies that burn and glow
With beauty that the spring could never know.

KNOWLEDGE

O I HAVE longed to know the secret ways
Of creeping grass and bursting buds in
spring;

To learn the magic song wood-thrushes sing
In tremulous twilights of long summer days.
With miser fingers I would grasp the rays
That summer dawns across my casement fling,
Gather the gold upon the oriole's wing
And pearls and opals from the sunset haze.

But when I see the stealthy hands of night
Unfold the darkening velvet of the sky,
And watch the wise full moon, burned out and
white,
Along her endless pathway wander by,
The night wind brings a whisper clear and low—
These are the secrets only Death can know.

AN OLD HOUSE

LIKE dull, blind eyes its dormer windows gaze
Across the meadow where it stands alone,
Within a deepening hush of twilight haze.
The crumbling garden wall is overgrown
With pallid bindweed flowers. No footsteps fall
Upon the grass-grown path that wanders by
The fast-closed door, and twittering swallows call
Among bare rafters yawning to the sky.

But now the unearthly afterglow mounts higher,
Touching the broken windows with its gleam,
And kindles there a ghostly candle fire.
The old house wakens from its long day-dream,
And as the glow lights up the ruined thatch,
I hear dead fingers clutching at the latch.

THE CATHEDRAL BUILDERS

ABOVE dark portals rise two lofty spires
That pierce into the blue. The sunlight
Across the gorgeous gloom, on oaken stalls
Worn smooth by praying hands of monks and
friars;

Tall windows gleam with many-colored fires,
As in the magic caves and mystic halls
Of ancient tales, and from the carven walls
Echo the wailing songs of vanished choirs.

And through the gloom the ghostly builders pass
Who carved their dreams of beauty on the stone—
The nameless ones who wrought and died un-
known;

Their life-blood glows upon the painted glass,
And from each spire dead hands that held the hod
Stretch upward clinging to the robes of God.

CURTAINS

I HUNG gay casement-cloth with birds and
flowers

Across my window-panes to hide the street,
Where on gray stones, through long toil-laden
hours,

The weary human footsteps throb and beat.
Emprisoned sunlight, warm and soft and mellow,
Shone through the silken shades across the pane,
And birds and daffodils of golden yellow
Brought back a memory of the spring again.

But all day long I heard the ceaseless beating
Of restless feet upon the pavement there,
And hungry even for a stranger's greeting,
I stripped my silk-swathed windows clean and
bare

Of birds and flowers, and flung my casement wide,
That I might see the human crowd outside.

BURNED FORESTS

THE HALF-BURNED tree-trunks stretched
like praying hands
Clutching the empty sky, and bare and black
As fallen pillars in old scourge-swept lands,
Great pines and spruces lay across my track.
Charred branches crumbled underneath my tread,
But from the silence of the empty plain,
Among white birches, burned and scarred and
dead,
I heard the white-throat sing his song again.

And from the ashes drenched by summer showers
I saw uncurling fronds of brake pierce through,
And fire-weed holding up its purple flowers
Like torches in the dark, and then I knew,
Seeing burned forests touched with quickening
breath,
That Life still follows on the trail of Death.

A CHINESE POET

LI FU, a Chinese poet, long ago,
Weary of strife, forsook the world and made
Himself a garden edged with cool green shade,
From pines and blossoming plum-trees in a row.
And by a hedge with crimson blooms aglow
He placed a tablet carved in sea-green jade,
Whereon each day the poet's scroll was laid,
That all who came his dreams might read and
know.

But if none paused and entered in to read
His written words, the poet paid no heed,
But wrote the dreams and visions of his soul.
That was a thousand years ago. To-day,
In a walled garden half a world away,
And in another tongue, I read his scroll.

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